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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS' DEC. 3 MEETING WITH SINGAPORE FM YEO

URGES ASEAN PRESSURE ON BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia L. Herbold, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Singapore and ASEAN should step up the pressure on the Burmese regime, U/S Burns told Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo on December 3. FM Yeo said ASEAN would stand aside on the Burma issue now that Burma had made it clear through its actions at the ASEAN Summit that it would only deal with the UN Security Council (UNSC) and not with ASEAN. Burma could not turn to ASEAN for support. FM Yeo said further pressure was needed to prevent regime backsliding. He suggested U.S.-ASEAN ties could be harmed if the Burma issue led to the withdrawal by the United States of the invitation to ASEAN to a Texas Summit. On other issues, FM Yeo congratulated the Secretary on the success of the Annapolis meetings and urged that the United States sustain its engagement in Asia. U/S Burns said that the United States is a global power that is fully conscious of its Asia-Pacific responsibilities. End Summary.

Burma/ASEAN

12. (C) U/S Burns, accompanied by the Ambassador, told Singapore FM George Yeo on December 3 that Singapore and ASEAN should step up the pressure on Burma's regime to engage in genuine dialogue with the regime. FM Yeo noted that Burma had become a sticking point in ties between the United States and ASEAN. He recalled the Secretary's "tongue lashing" of the Burmese representative during the September 27 ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in New York. He said ASEAN states felt that that relations with the United States should not be defined by the Burma issue alone. He cautioned that U.S.-ASEAN ties could be harmed if the Burma issue led to the withdrawal by the United States of the invitation to ASEAN to a Texas Summit for the 30th anniversary of US-ASEAN relations. FM Yeo said he understood U.S. domestic political pressures over Burma. ASEAN felt caught in the middle. The United States had an interest in ASEAN integration. ASEAN states were unhappy that Burma was holding ASEAN back, but an "all or nothing" U.S. stance on the Summit would be interpreted as an indication that the United States did not attach much importance to ASEAN. Meanwhile, China's engagement continued apace.

13. (C) U/S Burns responded that the United States valued its relations with ASEAN and did not want the Burma issue to eclipse those ties, but Burma posed a critical problem for ASEAN and the region. The United States would continue to pressure the Burmese regime to engage in genuine dialogue and expected that ASEAN would do so as well. China also needed to do more, building on its earlier efforts in support of UN Special Advisor Gambari's October mission. The United States supported Gambari, but if outside pressure on the regime were not maintained, Gambari's efforts could turn out to be a Potemkin process.

14. (C) FM Yeo, noting the Burmese regime's extensive control and Burma's isolation, stated that a solution would not be quick or easy. It would require a step-by-step process. The UN process was not perfect, but there was no alternative. Aung San Suu Kyi's (ASSK) difficult relations with the military junta complicated the problem, but the military still enjoyed some prestige and must be part of the solution.

Some of the younger generals knew that the current course was "stupid" and that, without change, the country could "blow up," but they also had vested interests in the system. FM Yeo predicted that at some point the "cookie will crumble," but he cited the warnings of Thant Myint U, grandson of former UN SYGEN U Thant, that a sudden collapse of the military could produce Iraq-like conditions. This was what China, India, and the countries of Southeast Asia all wanted to avoid, he said.

15. (C) U/S Burns expressed disappointment that Burma had blocked Gambari's planned briefing of East Asia Summit leaders during the ASEAN-related summits in Singapore,

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despite the efforts of Singapore and the Philippines. The United States would continue to support Gambari, but he should spend more time on the ground in Burma, given that he was the only bridge between the top generals and ASSK. U/S Burns noted that UN Human Rights Rapporteur Pinheiro had more success than Gambari in gaining access to key groups. The United States and the European Union would continue to apply pressure on Burma, and the issue would gain more attention in the Security Council. He urged that ASEAN exert pressure and asked about ASEAN's strategy for addressing Burma. He inquired whether appointing a prominent Southeast Asian envoy would be helpful.

16. (C) FM Yeo replied that ASEAN's failure to appoint an envoy was "not for lack of trying." Both Indonesia and Malaysia under its previous chairmanship of ASEAN had proposed high-level envoys but had been rebuffed by Burma. In rejecting the idea of Gambari's briefing the EAS in late November, Burma had made clear its preference for dealing directly with the UNSC and that it would accept no ASEAN role, Yeo stated. Southeast Asian countries could continue to press bilaterally, but ASEAN as an organization would "stand aside." All ASEAN leaders except Burma's had stood with Singapore PM Lee when he read the Chairman's statement on Burma after the ASEAN leaders' dinner. Burma would now not be able to seek ASEAN's support if the regime came under further UNSC pressure. FM Yeo acknowledged that the regime was "playing a game" with Gambari and agreed China should do more. Progress would be slow; the international community should lock in concessions the regime made along the way. Singapore would not impose sanctions on Burma, he said, but it did believe all parties had a role to play in maintaining pressure to ensure the regime did not backslide.

#### Middle East Peace Process

17. (C) Foreign Minister Yeo asked U/S Burns to convey his congratulations to the Secretary on the success of the Annapolis meetings. U/S Burns responded that there were two developments at Annapolis that provided hope. First, both Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had committed to a negotiation that would

address all sensitive issues. He highlighted PM Olmert's statement that, without a two-state solution, Israel's future as a Jewish state could not be assured. Meanwhile, Fatah's split with Hamas had strengthened President Abbas's resolve; without hope of peace, Fatah knew it would likely face increasing radicalism in the West Bank.

18. (C) U/S Burns said a second positive indication was the decision of twelve Arab countries, including Syria, to go to Annapolis. This would give the Arab countries a stake in the success of the process, he noted. The United States was realistic about the difficulties ahead but would press forward because progress was essential to addressing many other problems in the Middle East. FM Yeo noted that it is particularly important to have the Saudis involved, and said he thought PM Olmert's tenacity has been underestimated. FM Yeo applauded President Bush's commitment to the process, saying it was "the right thing to do."

#### U.S. Engagement in Asia

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19. (C) FM Yeo highlighted Singapore's deep bilateral ties with the United States, founded on a bedrock of shared interests. Our defense relationship was particularly strong, reflecting Singapore's view that the United States needs to be engaged in the region "forever." U/S Burns said that the United States was a global power fully conscious of its Asia-Pacific responsibilities. There was bipartisan consensus on the importance of Asia. The United States would continue to make Asia and the Pacific a top priority, along with the Middle East and South Asia. We would take account of changes of government in Australia, Japan, and South Korea, build our important relationship with China, and

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attend to other interests including APEC and ASEAN. FM Yeo noted that American interests with the "big players" were well established, but suggested U.S. ties with ASEAN were more in doubt due to Burma.

110. (U) U/S Burns cleared this message.

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